

# THREE BACHELOR GIRLS

MINNIE MAY MONKS



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**THREE BACHELOR GIRLS**



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BY  
MINNIE MAY MONKS



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*TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER*



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
I—BACHELOR GIRLS .....	11
II—FISHING AND HAYING.....	29
III—RAMBLING .....	45
IV—CHATTY AND THE PROFESSOR.....	57
V—BY-PATHS TO ARCADIA .....	75
VI—COOKING A DINNER .....	87
VII—IN CUPID'S GARDEN .....	99
VIII—HUCKLEBERRYING.....	105
IX—LOVE AND A WISH-BONE.....	125
X—CONCERNING A COURTSHIP.....	131



**THREE BACHELOR GIRLS**



# I

## BACHELOR GIRLS

“Come along, Ted!” said Chatty. “If you want me to stay up here in the mountains, you’ve got to get up and do something, or I’ll go back home today. Come! Get up! And don’t look so cross. Smile, Ted; laugh!” she bubbled, and tickled me until I rolled out of bed, begging for mercy.

“Why don’t you wake Bonnie?” I asked crossly.

“Oh, fire and thunder and Uncle Sam’s militia wouldn’t waken her,—and besides, she looks like such an angel lying there asleep. I wouldn’t be as blond, and soft, and angelic-looking as Bonnie for worlds. Brunettes are so much more attractive!”

“I’d let someone else say that, if I were you!” I snapped, as I picked myself up from the floor and reached for my clothes.

“Oh, what’s the odds—” said Chatty, dimpling, as she tiptoed over to the mirror and ran her fingers through her mass of dark wavy hair, and looked admiringly at her reflection.

“You must think it’s pleasant for me to be routed out of bed in this fashion, two hours ahead of time,” I grumbled, “but I suppose I’ll *have* to humor you.”

“Yes, Ted, you will,” answered Chatty sweetly, “or I’ll go home!”

When Chatty and I stole quietly out of the back hall door, we saw Uncle Billy stooping over a bench under the apple-tree, sousing his face and hands in a big basin of water. He isn’t our Uncle, but we thought he looked like such a nice old man that we immediately christened him Uncle Billy; and his wife, who is a plump, motherly little woman, we call Aunt Molly.

“Where you women going, so early in the morning?” asked Uncle Billy as he looked up at us in surprise.

"Up on the hill, to see the sun rise," answered Chatty.

"Well then, you'd better go right back to bed again, for the sun beat you up by an hour, and besides you'd get your feet all wet in the dewy grass."

"Back to bed! I guess not!" said Chatty. "I'm hungry. I suppose you have no objection to our eating some of those apples by the woodshed?"

"My, no! Go eat your fill," answered Uncle Billy good naturedly.

"Let me get up first, Ted—and give me a boost. You're tall, and can get up by yourself," said Chatty, eyeing the height of the shed. I boosted her, then scrambled up the best I could, holding on to the stout trumpet-vines that covered the sides of the shed.

After nibbling a few bites, Chatty began—I *knew* she would—"I'd like to know what you expect to do, back in these mountains, three miles from the railroad station, and

half a mile from the nearest neighbor. Last night the whip-poor-wills and crickets kept me awake till midnight, and made me so homesick I wanted to die! And then those wretched guinea hens, squawking 'pot rack' under my window, woke me before daylight. I can't content myself up here, just eating and sleeping all day as Bonnie does; and I wouldn't be as interested as you are, in everything wild, for worlds. And there isn't even one man around here for me to talk to!"

"Being a *Bachelor Girl*—" I commenced.

"Being a *Bachelor Girl*—" Chatty mimicked.

"You know very well, Ted, that when I joined the Bachelor Girl Club I didn't agree to give up the opposite sex. I don't want to marry, but I *do* like the men. Oh, you needn't sit there and wag your head at me like that! I tell you, a month of this life will kill me."

"You deserve a good shaking, Chatty," said I. "What more do you want? Lots of

fresh things to eat, no other boarders to bother us, no fancy clothes to make us uncomfortable, and these beautiful mountains of northern Jersey to climb. Just look around, and see what a nice big farm it is; that old apple orchard below us, and the green hills over yonder,—and here comes a drove of cows through the pasture-lot.”

“Yes, Ted, I know all that,” said Chatty, without raising her eyes from her apple. “Listen to the pigs grunt, and smell the swill. Ideal! *Perfectly* ideal! It’s all very nice for you, Ted,—but *you’re you*, and *I’m me*,—and there’s the difference! Of course *you’re* happy here; you always are, when you can wear an abbreviated skirt, and go without a hat. But you know very well that *I* like to dress up in pretty fluffy things, and talk to men and tease them and have them think I’m nice. Do you know, Ted, there’s a place here”—and she put her hand over her heart—“’way down here, tucked away in the lower left hand corner of the left ventricle of my

heart, there's something connected with the conjugal organ in the back of my head which tells me that I won't *always* be a bachelor girl."

"What!" I exclaimed, as I pushed myself back and gazed at her in astonishment. I gave myself another hitch,—and the next minute I was sliding bumpety-bump down the slippery moss-covered shingles of the old roof, and straight into the pig pen below,—striking my elbow funnybone with such force that it brought tears to my eyes, and I let out a yell that must have paralyzed those pigs, for they never squealed. And when I bounded out of the pen and looked back, they hadn't budged. While I was feeling of myself, to find how many bones were broken, Chatty peered over, and scolded.

"That's right, Ted," she said, "break you neck, and keep me up in this forsaken place another month, taking care of you." She hung her legs over the roof-edge. "Now, *how* am I to get down off this roof?"

I shrugged my shoulders, then limped round the corner of the house to the cherry trees, and settled down, with a groan for my bruised shins, in the old hammock made of barrel-staves strung on ropes—the most uncomfortable invention ever.

I wasn't in the hammock five minutes before I heard a racket among the guineahens. Their shrill, peculiar cry sounded unusually excited. Next I heard Uncle Billy shouting, "Hey, young woman! What are you doing to my guineas?"

"I'm chasing them out of your potato-patch, and trying to 'get even' for their waking me this morning," Chatty called back coolly.

"You are, eh! Well, I put those guineas in my potato-patch to eat potato-bugs off the potato-plants; that's what I keep guineahens *for*." He waved her away. "You chase butterflies and humming-birds, if you *must* chase something!"

I groaned—and flopped over in the hammock.

“Good heavens, Chatty! A person would think you were a child of six, instead of a woman of twenty-and-six,” I fairly shouted, as she came around the house. “What’s the matter with you, anyway?”

“Oh, shut up, Ted! I’ve got to have a little excitement.” She managed to keep cool and good during the rest of the morning.

“Let’s go swimming,” she suggested, after lunch.

“And where shall we get bathing-suits?” asked Bonnie.

“Leave that to me,” said Chatty. “I saw some pink pajamas on the clothes-line. Perhaps I can borrow those, on the Q. T., and the owner won’t know the odds!”

A few minutes later she returned, carrying a fat dark bundle. “Look at these duds!” she called to us breezily, shaking out three old gingham wrappers. “Fine for bathing-

suits. They're Aunt Molly's, and they ought to be loose and comfortable."

We started off to find a swimming-hole. From the barnyard bars a beaten trail led away over the hill to the edge of a cool, shady wood, then forked into two paths,—one leading into the wood, the other winding around the foot of the hill.

"We'll follow this one," I said, as I climbed over the rail fence and started along the wood path.

"And probably end in a potato-patch, as we did the last time you took us a-walking," said Chatty.

"Wood roads don't generally end in potato-patches," I retorted.

"But sometimes they end in *swamps*, and I haven't forgotten the time you took us hiking and lost us in the bogs, and kept us travelling round in a circle all day, through nasty puddles, till my new tan shoes were ruined!"

Despite Chatty's sarcastic remarks about

my guidemanship, we soon found the brook, and followed it, jumping from stone to stone, till we reached a sheltered spot where thick hemlock branches overhung a deep pool. Here we undressed, and donned our improvised bathing-suits.

“We’ll take a cold plunge, to begin with,” said Chatty. “It’s good for the nerves, they say,—and we won’t even wet our toes till we’re all ready. Don’t look so frightened, Bonnie; if you’d persevere with this sort of thing, you might get thinner. All ready? Now—One—Two—Three—Plunge!”

With one thundering splash we went under—and with a hundred shivering gasps we arose, and with us Aunt Molly’s wrappers, floating about us like great balloons.

“Brrrh! Fine as an ocean plunge, wasn’t it, Ted?” cried Chatty, glaring at me, as she blew water out of her nose and mouth. “And that nice ‘after glow’ one hears so much about—I haven’t felt it yet!”

Bonnie scrambled out on the bank.

"What—what made it so cold?" she shivered.

"Oh," said Chatty, "this is one of those 'clear, cold trout-streams, fed by icy springs' that you read about."

"That's just like you, Chatty," I said indignantly. "You persuade Bonnie and me to take the fool plunge with you, and then *you* do the growling. *We're* the ones—" I was silenced by a deluge of cold water. Then Chatty and I had it out. Up and down the stream we raced like wild things, splashing and upsetting each other in the water till we both were hot and breathless. Then I sat down on a sunny stone, while Chatty clambered up a steep, slippery rock above me.

"This sloping rock is a dandy shoot-the-shoots, Ted. What are you looking at?" she asked from above.

"I'm looking at my feet," I answered. "They look beautiful, with this clear water running over them—just like marble."

“Well, forget your *feet*, and look out for your *head*; I’m coming down to give you a ducking!” and she slid down the rock, catching me round the neck. Just as she went to duck me under, there was a crash in the bushes, close by. We held our breath—and waited. A big splash, and then we saw an ugly old black-faced buck sheep, with crooked horns, land in our pool, not ten yards away.

“Oh!” I heard Bonnie gasp, as I made a dash for the bank.

“*Skidoo*,” yelled Chatty. “He’s coming, Ted!”

I turned, and saw the old buck, with a baa like thunder, charging straight for us. I fled.

Through the bushes I broke my way. Up to the top of the hill I panted; then, pell mell, down the other side I raced, till I reached the old stone wall, where I tripped and fell. I heard a puffing breath behind me. The buck! For one long moment I closed my eyes, and gave up the ghost, till I realized that it was Chatty that landed, all in a heap

beside me. We looked back. Poor Bonnie! I guess she never ran before—and she only attempted a run now; she came down the hill in little jumps, landing her hundred and sixty pounds on poor me at the bottom.

From over the stone wall came a shout in a familiar, though unexpected voice—"Hello! What's going on?"

Painfully I dragged myself up on one bruised elbow, and beheld Bob—spick and span in a new outing suit—hurrying across the lot to the wall where we three sat huddled in a wet, disconsolate heap. (Bob is Bonnie's cousin, and the best-natured fellow that ever grew a crop of wavy auburn hair.)

"What the mischief are you girls up to?" he asked, as he approached.

Chatty poked her frowsy head over the wall.

"Hello, Chatty; you here too? How are you?" said he, trying not to laugh.

"Fine as a drowned rat!" said Chatty.

"How's yourself?"

"Bob, *please* don't look over the wall," I begged. "Go and catch the old buck that chased us out of the swimming-hole; he's back in the woods somewhere."

Bob chuckled. "Can't I come over to shake hands with you?" he asked boldly.

"No! You can *not*!" I cried.

"A nice way to treat a fellow who's come thirty miles to see you! Well, if you don't want me, I'll go after the buck," and he turned up the hill. Half-way up the path he turned. "Suppose the frisky beast chases *me*?" said he. We didn't dare to move, thinking the buck might come after us again. It seemed ages before Bob, striding down the hill, called out "All's well! I've got the old fellow in the wood lot, where he can't get out." Beyond our sheltering wall he stopped, politely turning his back on us. His shoulders were shaking, but he managed to keep most of the laugh out of his voice. "Reckon I'd better give you girls a tip," he said. "The Professor and Handsome came with me this

afternoon. They're down at the house, waiting for you. What shall I tell them?"

Chatty took command. "Tell them" she said solemnly, "that we are dressing, and will see them soon."

"And, O Bob! if you love me, keep them on the other side of the house till we get in," wailed Bonnie.

He turned toward the house. "BOB!" called Chatty.

"Yes?"

"How long are you all going to stay?"

"Oh, a couple of weeks, I guess."

"Goody!" and Chatty poked me delightedly. "Ted, I've decided to stay my time out," she added innocently. "We are having *such* a good time!"

"Little sinner!" said I, dragging my weary bones over the wall.

With Bob safely out of sight, we three hobbled up the hill to get our clothes. "Talk about folks liking to go barefoot! I should think they'd need leather feet," said Chatty,

as she stumbled along. "I'll never go bathing in a brook again," she howled, pulling a big brier out of her heel.

We threw on our clothes, any old way. When we hurried through the barn-yard, Uncle Billy, smiling broadly, hailed us from the shed door. "So old Buck-me-tuck gave you women a chase, did he? I was standin' here by the pasture bar, and I swan to goodness! I never see such runnin' and jumpin' since Brother Dan yoked himself to a young steer, trying to break the steer in."

"Old heathen!" muttered Chatty. "Might better have helped us, 'stead of laughing at us!"

When we reached the house we made for the back hall door, thinking no one would see us. But *they saw us*; and the Professor, tall and dignified and immaculate, walked down the hall to greet us—and Handsome, too—smiling, and handsomer than ever. (Handsome is tall and good-looking, with curly black hair. We call him Handsome just

among ourselves. Why not give people appropriate names, anyway?)

Just as the Professor and Handsome were shaking hands with us, Bob sauntered in, looking awfully surprised to see us. Dear innocent fellow! *He* ought to have been named *Lamb*!



## II

### FISHING AND HAYING

The next morning Handsome and Bob were sitting on the porch steps with Bonnie and me when Chatty came round the corner of the house and announced that she and the Professor were going fishing.

"Come along, lazy bones!" she said, giving each of us a poke in the ribs with her fish-pole.

"Go 'way! You'll make a mark on my clean waist," I cried.

"Oh, well you know I don't like to see you look too awfully nice, honey," said she, stooping down to rumple my hair. *Nothing* maddens me so much as to have my hair mussed, and Chatty knows it!

"How fierce you look, Ted!" she teased, patting me on the cheek.

"Better look out, Chatty," warned Bob,

“or she’ll do to you what she did to me once, when *I* mussed up her hair.”

“What did she do?”

“Bit me on the right cheek,” said Bob.

“I notice you don’t tell what *you* did,” I retorted.

“Bit you on the *left* cheek,” said Bob innocently.

“You did not!”

“Well—if I didn’t—let me do it now!”

I moved away. “*He*,” said I scornfully, pointing at Bob, “he pulled my hair, when I was a child, and it was not ‘just for fun,’ either; it was a real yanky, spunky pull!”

“Tell ’em why, Ted.”

“Just because I pinched him.”

“Tell ’em where, Ted.”

“Bob!”

“It was here, boys,” said Bob, tapping the calf of his leg. “The mark is still here, where she pinched me—just because I accidentally pushed her into a brook!”

“By all accounts, you two were always

quarreling and fighting, when you were youngsters," laughed Handsome. "It's a wonder you're not married to each other."

"So say I!" chuckled Bob, as he joggled my arm.

"I'm going fishing," said I, and walked away.

After digging worms for bait, and rigging up all the old fishing-tackle about the place, we started for the brook, taking a Dutch-cut across the fields, and walking along by twos.

Bonnie and Handsome took the lead. I love to see those two together. Bonnie carries herself with the slow, easy grace that many large women have, and she has the bonniest, good-natured face, with big mild eyes, and a beautiful dimple in one cheek when she laughs. Handsome is so magnificently big and handsome that it is a pleasure to look at him.

I turned my eyes in Chatty's direction, and I smiled. Chatty and the Professor look

awfully funny together! He takes long even steps, and she takes the bobbier little ones. Chatty is small, dark, sparkling. The Professor measures over six feet, and is quiet and dignified.

Bob and I walked in the rear. Bob is two inches shorter than I, and a great deal broader so of course we don't look so very nice together—but *we* don't care. We're old pals; I like Bob's company, and he likes mine.

Bob walked along carelessly, hands in his pockets, singing "Dearie."

"Is the 'Dearie' for me, Bob?" called Chatty, giving him a coquettish glance over her shoulder.

Bob kept on singing.

"Singing that to me, Bob?" she repeated.

"You make me tired, Chatty," said I. "You seem to think *all* love songs are aimed at yourself."

Chatty laughed—a little tickled laugh—"Why, they generally *are*, Ted," she said, and began to hum "Dearie."

We had reached the deep round pool below the waterfall—the pool in which Bob had caught ninety-one trout in one day, so *he* said. The first thing I did was to ram my fish-pole against a stone and break the end clean off.

“Some fine eels in this brook, boys,” said Bob to Handsome and the Professor. “We’ll have to go eeling some night.”

“I wouldn’t eat the horrid things,” said Chatty. “They look like snakes, and are all drippy like bull-frogs. Think of eating bull-frogs!” she shuddered, as a big one slipped into the water with a loud *ker-chug*.

“Chatty, you talk too much!” said Bob, good-naturedly.

“Want to know the reason?” she asked.

“Didn’t know there was a reason,” laughed Bob. “Just thought you were born with the gift o’ gab.”

“Well, I wasn’t,” retorted Chatty. “I was born tongue-tied, and if the Doctor hadn’t cut a little cord under my tongue, when I was

a baby, I could never have talked straight—and to show my appreciation I've talked ever since, and when I'm home I go down once a week to pay the good Doctor a call of thankfulness."

"By George! If you ever marry, I'll guarantee your husband won't go down and thank him!" laughed Bob.

Just then Bonnie got a nibble, and looking down I discovered a small turtle eating the last of her bait. That was enough of fishing for Bonnie.

Chatty had an awful time. First she got her line all tangled in the bushes. Then she hooked her dress instead of a fish, and finally she lost her garter. "My garter!" she cried frantically. Sure enough! there was Chatty's black garter, sailing gaily down stream. The Professor made an unsuccessful grab for it, without stopping to think. (If he had realized he was fishing for a girl's garter, I'm sure he would have let it sail away). He made another dive with one long arm, and caught

Chatty's treasure, nearly taking a header into the stream. As it was, he got his sleeve soaking wet. He brought the garter to Chatty and *then*, I guess, he happened to think what it was, for he looked very modest, and politely turned his back, and went on fishing.

Bob stood on a rock, nearby, watching the Professor's odd catch. He opened his mouth to say something, when—swish—he slipped off into a little foaming pool, up to his knees.

"Feel nice and cool, Bob?" I asked pleasantly.

"You come here," he growled, "and I'll show you how it feels!"

We fished and fished for two whole hours, but not one fish did we get. We girls were thoroughly disgusted with the morning's work, as we tramped back across the fields, tired and hot and hungry, with nothing to carry home but the old fishing-tackle.

"You'd had to throw them back, anyway," consoled Bob, "'cause the law is on."

"Well, I guess I wouldn't have thrown mine

back," said Chatty. "If I ever have the luck to catch a fish, I'll eat him, law on or off! Anyway, if there were no fish to catch, there's lots of hay. We'll go haying this afternoon," and she nodded toward the meadow, where we could hear the click of a mowing machine.

As we reached the house I saw Bob sneak around the back way, and into the kitchen. After a few minutes I sauntered that way too, to see what he was up to. He was standing by the stove, frying something that smelled good.

"What are you cooking?" I asked.

"Something!" he answered mysteriously. Then he added solemnly, "And don't let me hear a yip out of you, Ted, until after dinner!"

I shrugged my shoulders, and walked out-of-doors to join the girls. Whatever it was that Bob had cooked, it tasted delicious. Chatty ate a little more than her share of it—and looked longingly at the empty platter

when there was no more. Bob, watching her, chuckled delightedly.

“What’s the matter?” asked Chatty, as she looked suspiciously at him.

“Nothing,” he answered, “only I’m pleased that you appreciate the legs of the bull-frogs I caught in the spring this morning.”

“They were not frogs’ legs!” cried Chatty indignantly.

“Yes, they were!” said Bob, tantalizingly. “I caught ’em, and I cooked ’em.”

“I’d like to cook *you*!” blazed Chatty, and she jumped up from the table, “and I’d like to put snails in your soup, and hold pepper under your rascally nose till you sneezed your head off!”—and then she sailed out of the room.

When Uncle Billy drove out of the barnyard with the empty hay-ricking after dinner, we girls hailed him for a ride—that is, Chatty and I did; Bonnie never hails anybody.

“You women beat all,” said Uncle Billy, as we scrambled into the wagon and asked

him to let us take turns driving the oxen to the hay field. Uncle Billy has the distinction of being the only farmer in the country who owns a yoke of oxen. He calls them "Buck" and "Berry."

"I never see such women as you," said he, as he stood back and watched us drive. All the women of your age that I know, is settled down, and takin' care of their young uns—and here you three gallop 'round the country, for all the world like young colts kickin' up their heels in a clover field."

"That's the way we feel just now, Uncle Billy," said I. "This is our vacation time. We work all the rest of the year. Chatty and Bonnie are shut up in school-rooms, teaching—and I have my work. We *need* to stretch our muscles. And then, you know, we are bachelor girls, and we don't *have* to settle down."

"What's a bachelor girl?" inquired Uncle Billy.

"A bachelor girl, Uncle Billy, is an indepen-

dent unmarried woman, who is capable of taking care of herself," I answered. "She doesn't accept the first wrong man that comes along, and she doesn't sit moping, waiting for the right one to come poking along, either! No, the modern unmarried woman has too many things to interest her, for *that*. And if she is poor, she doesn't depend upon her good old Dad for clothes and spending-money; she sallies forth to paddle her *own* canoe! That's what a *real bachelor girl* is, Uncle Billy."

"You don't say!" was his comment.

"Yes, Uncle Billy, that's all so. And we have some pretty good times, in the bargain. When vacation time comes, we are free to go *where* we please and *how* we please, and to have a good time generally. We wouldn't be taking a ride to the hay field like this, and having the fun we are having, if we were married. It would be 'Katherine's hair needs curling, Bobby's dirty hands must be washed, Baby Boy must have his bath'—and a thousand and one other things—"

Chatty interrupted—"Whoopee! Here's our jumping off place. All hands to work!"

Bonnie and Chatty cocked hay, while I pitched it on the wagon—pitched it on, when it didn't come tumbling back over me. The hired man strolled over to a tall oak tree—the only shady spot in the meadow—and threw himself down on the grass. He said he guessed *he'd* take a rest, and give us a chance to learn the whole trade. I didn't look to see how Bonnie and Chatty were getting along; I was too busy. I worked so hard that I soon had a kink in my back, and I wished the load would go on faster. Finally I heard Chatty say, "Oh, fudge! It's all rot about Maud Muller raking hay on a summer day. 'Tisn't a bit *romantic* to have hayseed down your back, and your hands all blistered, and your face all burned, and your clothes sticking fast to your skin. I guess she wouldn't feel very loving with the Judge, or anybody else, if she felt the way I do! Here, Uncle

Billy, take your old fork! I don't want any more haying."

"Ho, shucks! You're no farmer," scoffed Uncle Billy.

I turned around, and leaned on the handle of my pitchfork to rest my back. There was Bonnie—resting *her* back against a hay cock, and looking very comfortable. "Here, Bonnie, get up and help me load this hay!" I ordered, trying to drag her to her feet. She held back like a balky horse, and settled down as comfortably as ever.

"I don't feel equal to it, Ted; really, I don't. When Chatty suggested haying, and I said 'Yes,' I didn't expect to *work*! Please let me alone. I was nearly asleep when you shook me."

The hired man came over and took a hand at loading. Evidently he did not approve of our haying methods. I was tired and thirsty, so I ran out to the road, where a stream of water gushed out of a pipe into a horse trough, and got a drink, and when I got back to the

wagon the hired man was pitching on the last forkful of hay. He and Uncle Billy gave us a lift up on the load, and I climbed over in front. Uncle Billy said I could drive, 'cause I was the most capable one. Chatty said I had conceited smirks all over my face, I was so tickled with my job.

The oxen slowly plodded along, and I shouted "Whoa! Haw there, Berry. Get a move on, Buck! Gee!" Everything went splendidly till we reached the narrow brook at the edge of the meadow; then the hayrick swayed over sideways. I remember perching high and dry one minute; the next, I was smothered, drowned and buried all at once. Then someone took hold and pulled me out. Presently I saw daylight, and then my feet flew out into space. As I sat on the grass, half dazed, I saw Uncle Billy drag Chatty out by the shoulders. Bonnie was still under the hay, and squealing. It took both Uncle Billy and the hired man to pull her out; and when they did, the

hired man, who seemed a bit excited, set her down in the brook.

The oxen stood quiet. The wagon stood lopsided, minus three-quarters of its load. Uncle Billy and the man stood looking at the mess, and we girls sat staring stupidly at each other till Chatty got her breath.

"It's all your fault, Ted!" she cried indignantly. "You don't know any more than a baby about driving oxen."

"That's right—it *was* Ted's driving that caused the spill," agreed Bonnie, and then we three burst into a fit of hysterical laughter. Uncle Billy turned around and looked at us.

"Well—by—cracky!" he ejaculated. "The spirits of you women is harder to dampen than feathers on a goose's back!" Then he added, rather spitefully, "I guess you'd better go to the house now, before you do any more damage 'round the place." We got up to go, mentally resolving we'd *never* go haying again. As we turned away I heard the hired

man say to Uncle Billy, ‘‘*Goldarn ’em!* Upset a whole load of hay, and don’t care a *cuss!*’’

We took the short cut cross the fields and through the apple orchard. We didn’t feel very gay after our spill; and our consciences hurt us a little when we thought of Uncle Billy and the hired man having to pitch all that hay on again. The man had said we didn’t care a cuss, but we *did!*

### III

## RAMBLING

Bob, Handsome and the Professor started out after breakfast, next day, to hunt up an old iron mine in the mountains. Bonnie lay in the barrel-stave hammock, reading a novel, and Chatty had disappeared. A good chance for me to take a ramble, all by myself in the woods, I thought. It was warm that morning, and I thought how comfortable I'd be if I could shed my thick skirt. I slipped it off, to see the effect. My bloomers looked a trifle scant and masculine,—but then, no one would see me, so I didn't care. I hurried out to the barn-yard, and was scrambling over the bars when Uncle Billy came striding along.

“Where you going?” he asked, stopping to look me over.

“Oh, I'm off for the woods. I'm a tomboy,

a savage, and a hatless, skirtless bachelor girl! Don't I look as happy and comfortable as a real man?"

"Well, I swan!" he ejaculated, as he gazed at my natty bloomers, and I, feeling somewhat abashed, turned and walked away.

I didn't feel in the mood for walking in beaten paths that morning, and as soon as I struck a little trail at the edge of the woods I turned off into a tangle of wildwood and prepared for a rough and tumble scramble. Breaking my way through the brush I was startled by a sudden whirr of wings, and a quail, perched on a branch overhead, whistled a loud, breezy "quoit," and from the distance came the answer—a ringing "Bob White!"

"A good place for the little wood folk," thought I, as a woodpecker hammered on a tree close by, and I almost stepped on a Molly Cottontail that darted in front of me and into the thicket.

As I pushed through a tangle of vines I almost fell into the brook—a chattering little

brook, bubbling all around a big gray rock which was covered with the most velvety moss. With one bound I landed in the middle of the rock.

There is as much difference in brooks as there is in people. *This* brook was the nicest kind. Its waters were clear and pure; its bed shone with clean, smooth pebbles; and it babbled a pretty song as it went on its way. It was a delightful spot, that big mossy rock in the middle of the brook, and I revelled in it there—all alone. I thought about Robinson Crusœ. He must have enjoyed his solitude sometimes! Of course, there was a vast difference between his solitude on an unknown island 'way out in the wide ocean, and mine on a rock in the middle of a mountain brook, where I could give a jump, land on shore, and go home, when I got hungry, to a good dinner. It was to be chicken fricassee that day, I knew, for I had seen Aunt Molly beheading two chickens that morning—and country people always fricassee spring chick-

ens, leaving the old roosters and hens for pot-pies.

Presently I heard a great chattering. Raising myself on one elbow I gazed about, and spied a bright-eyed little chipmunk perched on a mossy old tree-stump, staring at me as if he were quite interested in the new specimen of animal visiting his forest home. I sat up and stared back at him, but he never blinked, and he continued to chatter in the most friendly manner. Crusœ talked to his parrot; seeing the chipmunk was socially inclined, I decided to talk to *him*.

“Chippy, you have ears to hear with, and I feel like talking. I haven’t had a real chance to talk since I came to the country; Chatty does it all!”

He sat up on his haunches, turned his head to one side, and eyed me critically, then patronizingly chirped “Go ahead!”

“Chatty is a *darling*, Chippy, and she reminds me somewhat of you! She has the same saucy way of turning her head on one

side, and looking up at people with her bright eyes, only she chatters even *more* than you! She would never listen so long without saying something. But talking isn't Chatty's worst fault. No, indeed! Chatty's besetting sin is *flirting*. She flirts with every nice man who comes her way. Just now it is the Professor, and he adores her. She went driving with him last night, and he looked awfully unhappy when he came home. I shouldn't wonder if he had proposed and Chatty had refused him. I don't like to have Chatty flirt with a nice, good man like the Professor, and fool him. Chatty flirts with Bob, too, sometimes; but if she carries it too far with *Bob* there will be war between Chatty and me. Yes, there will, Chip! Chatty is an orphan, and younger than I, and I feel sort of responsible for her actions. Besides, I am President of the Bachelor Girl's Club, and it is against our rules for the members to flirt, but when I say anything to Chatty she just puts her arms around me and says 'Now, shut up, old

Honey Bunch! It's nothing serious at all; I'm just having a little fun.'

"Now Bonnie is quite different. She never bothers her head with the opposite sex. Indeed, Bonnie wouldn't take the trouble to carry on a flirtation! Bonnie is my other chum, Chippy, and the sweetest girl imaginable. I love Bonnie because she's so nice to look at, and so restful and lazy. Just as lazy and peaceful as a cow chewing its cud. Bonnie always reminds me of a beautiful Jersey cow. Wonder what she'd say if I told her that?

"You understand, Chippy, we are bachelor girls, we three; and *bachelor girls* always have ambitions. There's no use in a *married* woman having ambitions, because if she *has* her husband just gives a large wave of his hand, and says 'Never mind—you needn't bother your head about it, dear, I'll attend to all that!'

"Now *bachelor* girls can do all the *fool things* they want to, and no man dare say

they dasn't. We expect to do lots and lots of nice things in our lives, we three, Chippy. We have ambitions galore,—and after we've accomplished all the work we want to do we shall retire, and settle down, and build a little bungalow on a hill in the mountains. We have even chosen a name for our house, Chippy, but *that* is a secret. Don't sit there chipping and making fun of me like that! This is no air-castle I'm telling you about, sir! Why, we have the plans all drawn for our bungalow, and it's going to be a beauty, with a dormer roof, and overhanging eaves, and a rustic porch along the front. We're going to have the little house stained just the color of the trunk of that old elm tree yonder, so it will look as if it grew in the woods, because our back yard will be right *in* the woods. And you can come and play in our back yard, Chippy.

“Inside, our bungalow is going to be the most comfortable place imaginable, especially our living-room, which will be light and roomy

and full of places to rest. We'll have a divan, a big wide one, piled with sofa pillows—not hard square things, beautifully embroidered, that sit up straight and dare you to lay your head on 'em. No, none of that kind for me! Stiff, forbidding things! I don't want to use 'em, or even look at 'em! Scattered about the room, here and there, will be nice sleepy chairs, and rocking chairs, too—I don't care if they are bad for the nerves! It's bliss to cuddle up in a big rocking chair, with a book and a lapful of apples. We'll have a long bookcase built in, and filled with the books we like, and *none* that we don't like. I tell you Chippy, our little house—”

Just then another chipmunk came running down from a nearby tree, and dashing up to Chippy commenced chattering in the most saucy manner. Evidently Chippy's frau. She was terribly excited, and it sounded as though she were giving him a good calling down for neglecting her so long. It must have been that, for my Chippy gave one

brief chip at me, then turned and ran after her as fast as he could scamper, up the chestnut tree—and that was the last I saw of him.

Having no other creature to talk to, I stretched myself out on the moss, keeping my eyes closed, but feeling deliciously aware of the sunlight falling through the branches overhead, the soft breeze blowing across my face, and the clear note of a woodthrush nearby. Gradually the present seemed to fade away, and I lay in the midst of downy pillows, with dream flowers waving all about me, and birds carolling everywhere.

From my enchantment I was rudely wakened. There was a crash above me, and I opened my eyes on two big feet, poked through the vines, within a foot of my head.

“Don’t be frightened. It’s only I,” said a voice. “I slipped and fell on your rock. Awfully sorry to scare you, Ted!”

“Go away, before I push you into the brook!” I cried, springing to my feet. “I was having *dreams*, and here *you* come thunder-

ing down over my head, 'most knocking my brains out with your big hoofs!"

"Mad as a hornet," said Bob. Then he looked at my bloomers, and gave a long whistle.

I didn't answer, but stamped my foot and walked away with as much dignity as I could muster. The next minute I caught my hair on some low branches. Bob leaned over and released me, then patted me on the head as if I were a poodle. "Deucedly sorry to frighten you, Ted," said he. "I was taking a short cut through the woods when I caught sight of you through the vines; I was about to speak, when my foot slipped and I rolled over on your rock."

I marched on without answering. Presently I heard Bob chuckle.

"Say, Ted, you walk like an Indian. You toe in. Did you know it?"

I swung around, and found him grinning his most *tormenting* grin. "You walk in front of me!" I ordered, as I stepped back

of him, "and don't you *dare* to turn your head once." I didn't speak to him again until we reached the barn-yard bars. Chatty was walking hurriedly across the fields, and we stopped to wait for her.

"Uncle Billy is mad at me, Ted, and it's your fault for running off and leaving me!" she panted. "I couldn't find anyone to talk to, so I set out to explore the farm, and when I found the pear and peach orchard up yonder, of course I went in, and helped myself to some fruit. I was just setting my teeth in the most juicy, luscious pear I ever saw, when Uncle Billy came along.

"'Hi, young woman, drop it!' he shouted, and then he walked around under the trees, peering up into the branches. 'Guess you got all the fruit there was—didn't you?', he sputtered. 'This is the first year these trees have borne, and I wanted to try the different brands.'

"'Oh, if that is *all*, Uncle Billy, I can tell you just what they look like, and how they

taste,' said I. 'From this tree I got the most beautiful yellow pear with red cheeks—it just melted in my mouth—'”

Bob had been emitting a series of chuckles, and now he exploded in a whoop.

“And what’s the matter with *you?*” demanded Chatty, but Bob only shook his head and walked away, and when he joined Uncle Billy by the woodshed Chatty and I heard them laughing uproariously together.

“Men *are* such fools!” said Chatty, as she swung over the bars.

## IV

### CHATTY AND THE PROFESSOR

The Professor is naturally good-natured, but of course he doesn't like to be made a fool of,—and sometimes Chatty *does* go too far.

It was the night that Uncle Billy came home late from market, after dark. When we heard the farm wagon drive up the lane Chatty lighted the lantern and took it out to the barn. She loves horses, and she helps unhitch them whenever she gets a chance. After the horses were fed and stalled, to her satisfaction, she and Uncle Billy started for the house. When they passed the wagon house they heard a faint whining, which proceeded from the big market wagon.

“I bet that's one of the pups,” said Uncle Billy, and he commenced to whistle.

“I’ll find him—give me the lantern,” said Chatty, climbing over the dash-board into the wagon. “It’s in this market-basket. Take it, Uncle Billy, while I jump down. It’s covered with a white knitted shawl—how funny!” She pulled the shawl off—“Merciful father! Look here!” And Uncle Billy, stooping over, looked down upon the face of a baby, with big blue eyes, blinking hard at the lantern light.

“Well, I’ll eat my hat, if Mrs. Stone didn’t forget her babe!” ejaculated Uncle Billy as he took the soft bundle out of the basket and held it tenderly. “I met the poor woman in the City. She had the babe on one arm, and a stack of bundles on the other, an’ she was hustlin’ to catch the train. I told her to jump in and ride up home with me. She laid the babe in the basket so as to rest her arms, and I guess she was that tuckered out that she forgot all about the babe when we stopped at her house.”

The rest of us were sitting by the dining-

room table and I was reading palms, and telling the Professor he'd surely marry before he was fifty, when Chatty came running into the room with the baby hugged tight in her arms.

"See what I found!" she cried. "Oh, you rosy, pinky little thing!" she bubbled, as she caressed the baby's soft face with the tips of her fingers. "The poor little kiddo is hungry!" she added, as the baby began to suck its tiny fist. "Here, Professor, take it a minute, while I get it something to eat."

The dazed Professor looked after Chatty's disappearing form in blank amazement; then he gazed soberly and awe-fully down at the tiny creature which he held awkwardly on one arm, and seated himself gingerly on the straightest chair in the room. The new-found baby sucked its little dimpled fist, slobbered a bit on the Professor's clean shirt, curled up its toes, and wriggled inside its long white dress,—and coo'd and goo'd softly up at him in its baby language. But the Professor only

wrinkled his forehead and looked most solemn, at every move it made. Then the baby, realizing that it was getting no coaxing, no tossing, and no wooing talk in return for its cunning maneuvers, puckered up its face and gave a wailing "Waa!" and its wee arms and legs shot out so vigorously that the Professor almost dropped it.

"*You* know what to do with it, Miss Ted. Take it!" said the perspiring Professor as he walked over to me and held out the baby. But I shook my head, and turned my back, and got behind the door and stuffed my handkerchief into my mouth.

Just then Chatty came running in, with a bowl of milk. "Mercy, Professor," she scolded, "you're holding that baby upside-down. You don't ever deserve to be a father!" She caught the baby away from the Professor just as his scholarly eye-glasses tumbled off, and the baby, with its fist fastened in his correct necktie, nearly pulled *that* off too.

The poor Professor disappeared out-of-doors. Chatty made a dash at me. "You Ted, ought to be ashamed to let him hold a baby like that. You are just—" But by that time I had gone too.

When I came in, Chatty had put the baby to bed on the big couch. Half an hour later a frightened-looking woman came running into the sitting room, made a dive for the couch, and caught the baby up in her arms.

"Now you've waked that baby, after I took such pains to put it to sleep!" scolded Chatty.

"Maybe you would too, if you had lost your baby," retorted the woman.

"Lose a *baby*! That's the last thing in the world *I'd* lose, I reckon," snapped Chatty. The woman gazed at her wonderingly, then retreated to the kitchen with the baby, to talk over her experience with Aunt Molly.

The Professor had very little to say to Chatty next day, and when we started out for a walk, late in the afternoon, and Chatty

asked him to go along, he replied stiffly that Uncle Billy had invited him to drive to the village. Chatty, with the most daredevil expression shining in her eyes, turned to the rest of us—"Let us *walk* down to the village." At our consent she ran into the house, appearing a moment later, stuffing something into her blouse.

When we were halfway down to the big white iron bridge, where the brook joins the river, Chatty stopped by Spook Spring and told us to go on—she would catch up with us later, she said. Somewhat mystified, we did as she bade us, stopping every little way, and then walking on again slowly. We had almost reached the other side of the bridge when we heard an awful racket behind us, and we turned 'round, to see a drove of black and white Holstein cows tearing down the road. They were bellowing madly; their tails flew over their backs, and their hoofs made a deafening noise as they galloped over the bridge, raising the dust in clouds. The first

cow—the wildest looking of them all—wore on her neck a bell which dingle-dangled like fury, while she made great plunges with her head down and her tail up. We had only a second to get off the bridge to the river-bank before the whole drove thundered past us and down the road.

Then we heard a shout, and before we could think what the matter was, we saw a horse and buggy speed like a whirlwind down the opposite bank of the river and splash smack! into the water. Up and down the horse reared and plunged, churning the water into such a foam that we soon lost sight of the occupants of the buggy, but above all the splashing we heard Uncle Billy's voice a-shouting—"Whoa, you damned old reprobate, whoa! I'll whale thunder out of you, you Satan horse!"

The next minute the waters looked like Niagara's whirlpool rapids. The buggy disappeared, and Uncle Billy's voice was suddenly hushed, but soon there was a great snorting

and plunging, and the horse came tearing up the bank, dragging the buggy upside-down. Bob caught the bridle, and brought the "Satan horse" to a standstill, while Handsome looked into the buggy to see if the occupants had survived. Uncle Billy and the Professor *had* survived, all right, but they crawled out on the other side of the river, and I guess Uncle Billy swallowed a gallon of water, the way he gurgled when he arose from his dip. "*Where's that dadgasted horse of mine?*" he shouted, as he made a grab for the carriage-blanket, floating nearby. The Professor hadn't uttered a sound since he struck the water. Now he scrambled up to the bridge, looking half drowned.

Together the men examined the buggy and harness. Of course everything was sopping wet, but the breaching-strap was the only thing broken. Uncle Billy led the horse home, and the Professor walked silently at his side.

Chatty joined us, looking quite uncon-

cerned. "Dear me," she whispered to me, as she walked behind the Professor, eyeing him critically, "he looks like any other ordinary man, with his eye-glasses off and his hair all wet, doesn't he?"

I nudged her to keep still. "Was it the cows that frightened your horse, Uncle Billy?" I asked.

"Why, yes—I guess so," said Uncle Billy doubtfully. "A young cow always acts like *old Satan*, first time she gets a bell tied on her neck. But before the cows came along, something mighty queer happened up the road. The horse was going along on a nice little jog, when all of a sudden a lot of water came right down on his head, and set him a-rearin. Then along comes that drove o' cattle, lickety-split, and that set the horse clean crazy. He danced along sideways till we got to the river, then off the bank he goes, kersplash in the water." He scratched his head in perplexity. "I'd like to know where that water fell from! It was somewhere

along here, by Spook Spring. I believe it was some kind of a sign!"

"Yes," I thought, "a sign of Chatty's pranks!"

The night after the ducking I started out alone for a walk. Bonnie and Handsome had just disappeared down the lane together. The Professor sat by the dining-room table reading. Bob and Chatty I could not find until I reached the apple orchard. *Then* I heard them! It was Chatty speaking. "No, Ted isn't the type of girl to marry. She's so provokingly independent. But *I know* her soft spot, Bob," and she whispered something in his ear—yes, whispered—I could see her mouth close to his head, and then she giggled until I wanted to choke her. I turned away—Oh! but my face and ears were burning! I was "just hopping." What business had Chatty to discuss me with Bob, and say that I "wasn't the type of girl to marry?" Of course I wasn't! But she had no business to say so to Bob. And *he* was chuckling as if

something struck him very funny. I ran down the path as noiselessly as I could, and when I had almost reached the house I butted right into the Professor, who was walking in the opposite direction.

"You're all out of breath," he said. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," I answered as calmly as I could, "only I heard Chatty and Bob talking, and I ran away."

"Well?" and the Professor looked at me to enlighten him further.

"I didn't stay to hear any more, because they were talking about confidential things with their heads close together, and whispering."

The Professor looked uncomfortable, and I didn't care. I was uncomfortable and mad myself, and I wanted to make someone else feel so, too.

When I got back to the house I wanted to quarrel with Chatty, and I wanted to get it over with, quick; so when she came

in I sauntered into her room to borrow a pin.

“Say, Chatty, what’s the matter between you and the Professor?” I asked. “You two don’t seem to be on as friendly terms as you were.”

“No, I’m *mad* at him, and I’m doing *everything* I can to torment him. I made him hold the baby, on purpose, night before last, and I *meant* for him to get a good ducking yesterday!”

“Chatty!”

“Any man who’s as slow as *he* is at making love, deserves to be half drowned. Yes, he does! He’s just too stiff for anything. I’ll tell you all about it”, she said with a sigh, and she nestled her head on my shoulder in a most affectionate manner. Is there *anything* more aggravating than to have someone commence loving you when you’re just in the humor for a good scrap? I didn’t dare to push Chatty away, but I wanted to!

“Ted, I gave the Professor a chance to

kiss me, the other night, and he didn't do it!"

"*Chatty! How could you!*"

"Well, I did," she sighed. "It was Sunday night, when the Professor and I were driving along that nice thank-ee-mam road, up the mountain. You know how beautiful the moonlight was, and I felt in my most lovable mood. I was nestling down so cosy by him, and when he said what a fine night it was, I just snuggled a little closer, and murmured, 'Yes, such nights were made for lovers and kisses.' He never took the hint at all! He's just too proper and precise for anything. But I've had a *little* satisfaction out of him, anyway," she gurgled. "Didn't he look funny and *scared*, holding the baby? Do you know, Ted, he only spoke to me in monosyllables all day yesterday, and when he refused to go walking with us in the afternoon I felt like having more revenge—and a sudden thought popped into my head. You know I always could climb trees like a squirrel, and I

knew where there was a tin pail hidden in the bushes by Spook Spring, so I got a piece of twine, and took you all walking down that way.

“I knew Uncle Billy and the Professor would soon come driving down the road. After you went ahead I got the pail and tied the twine on the handle, and filled it with water and scrambled up in the tree to a limb that overhangs the road. Then I pulled the pail up, and fixed it in a crotch of the limb at just the right angle. After that I slid down the tree and waited for the buggy. The old horse soon came trotting along. When I thought the Professor’s head was directly under the pail I pulled the string.”

“You never—” I gasped.

“Yes,” she nodded her head, “and down came the water on the *horse* instead, and oh Ted, you should have seen that horse dance. Then that awful drove of cows came bawling down the road like mad, and I was frightened stiff. I followed them down the road as fast

as I dared, expecting to find Uncle Billy and the Professor dumped out in the road, and maybe stone dead! When I reached the bridge I was so excited I couldn't speak, and when I found that Uncle Billy and the Professor were safe, and the runaway was laid to the cows, I let it go at that. Of course you think I'm awful, Ted, and I really am—it's the worst thing I've done since I grew up—but I've angled for that old Professor so long, and I can't find out whether he's in love with me or not. Of course—I don't want to *marry* him! I just want to know that I *could* if I *would*." She stopped to get her breath.

"Chatty! Sometimes I think you're possessed of an imp of the devil," I raged, and seizing her by the shoulders I shook her till her hair tumbled down.

"Let me go, Ted!" she gasped. "I'm going to keep right on tormenting the Professor, for I know he likes me, and I'm flirting with Bob as hard as I can, to make him jealous. Now Bob and kissing"—

"You don't mean to say that *Bob kissed you!*" I exclaimed breathlessly.

"Well, what if he did? You're not jealous, are you? Why, Ted!" Chatty sat up straight, and looked searchingly at me. "I believe you *are* fond of Bob, in your own way. I really do. And now I'm sure of it—you're blushing! Oh, Bonnie," she called into the next room, "Ted's in love with Bob! Well, you're welcome to him. I wouldn't wake up with that shock of red hair blazing in my eyes every morning, for worlds!"

"Bob's hair isn't red; it's auburn!" I said indignantly.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Did you hear *that*, Bonnie? 'Bob's hair is *auburn!*' Now I'm as sure as sure can be, that you're in love with Bob," she cried, as she clapped her hands, and hugged me delightedly.

"If you don't stop I'll give you another shaking!" I threatened.

"Well, I'm through now. Get off my bed. Do you think I want to roost on the foot-

board? Oh, just a minute—blow my lamp out, will you please, Honey? I'm always afraid someone will reach out and catch hold of my toes, when I get into bed in the dark. Thanks, awfully, Ted. Good-night!"



## V

### BY-PATHS TO ARCADIA

Handsome had been telling us about an old abandoned farmhouse he had discovered on the other side of the ridge, so Bob and I started out in the morning to find it. I made up my mind that Chatty should not get another chance to flirt with Bob anymore, after saying he had red hair, so I sneaked off with him, while she was upstairs changing her dress.

We followed a path through the ten acre wood-lot, and had just reached the edge of the woods, when we came to the brook—and not a single stepping-stone was in sight! Nothing but a shaky log for crossing.

“What’s the matter?” said Bob after he had crossed the log, and turned to find me still on the opposite side.

"I can't cross running water."

"Nonsense!"

"Well, I can't. Have you forgotten the time I fell in, trying to cross on a log like this?"

"You were only a kid then. Come along!" he said, as he ran back over the log and seized my hands. "I'LL walk backwards; you look at me, and imagine you're crossing Brooklyn Bridge."

"No, I can't."

"Then I'll wade and carry you."

"I don't want you to. I'll creep"—and down I got, and started along on my hands and knees, looking fearfully down into the current below. "Oh, Bob!" I cried, "I feel so dizzy. I'm moving right along with the current,—and I can't creep another inch!"

Bob chuckled. "Stay where you are," he said, "and I'll get you in a jiffy," and he waded into midstream and took hold of me. "Now, drink to me with thine eyes and

“CREEP!” he laughed, and in two minutes I was sitting high and dry on the other bank, waiting for him to put on his socks and shoes. Then we waded through grass waist-high till we came to the deserted farmhouse—a dilapidated old shack, but rather picturesque, with hop vines covering the gray weather-beaten boards. At the side of the house was a well with a long wooden sweep dipping into it. Bob and I were thirsty after our long walk, and we were starting up the hedged path to the well when we heard a familiar voice say “Oh, that would be lovely!” and Bonnie appeared round the corner of the house, followed by Handsome.

“The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket, the moss covered bucket that hangs in the well!” sang Handsome, in his rich baritone voice, as he lowered the bucket and pulled it up full of water.

Balancing the bucket on the edge of the curb, he tipped it toward Bonnie, and she, holding back her skirts from the damp well-

grass, leaned over and took a drink. I noticed how wistfully Handsome regarded Bonnie, and that when she had finished drinking he put his lips to the same spot that hers had pressed. Then, stooping over her, he said something in an undertone, so low that we could not hear, and Bonnie blushed.

“K—choo! Ah—K—choo!” It was *I* who gave that startling sneeze which caused Handsome and Bonnie to turn round in surprise.

“So this is the place you come to spoon, is it?” asked Bob genially, as we emerged from behind the hedge.

“Hello! How did you get here?” exclaimed Handsome.

“On shanks’ mare,” said Bob. “How did you?”

“We had the horse and buggy, and came by the old road. I’ve got the horse tied around back. Come on around and look at the queer old cellar.”

“No, thanks,” said Bob, “we’ll just get a drink from your ‘old oaken bucket,’ and then Ted and I’ve got to hoof it back for dinner.” Then—“Allow me,” he said, tipping the bucket for me. “The way Handsome did it, too,” he chuckled wickedly, as he found the place where I drank. Bonnie looked conscious, and Handsome looked ruffled.

“Come along, Ted, we’ll trot along,” said Bob, taking my arm. “Ta-ta! See you two later” he called back.

“Ted, I’ve got something to tell you,” said Bob as we stepped briskly along the road. “I feel a little bit sneaky for not telling you before, but I had promised Bonnie I wouldn’t breathe it to a soul. That was three years ago, and I reckon that’s long enough to keep any secret. I’ll tell you now, if you’ll keep mum.”

“I never knew Bonnie had a secret,” said I.

“I guess you don’t know Cousin Bonnie as well as I do, if you *have* chummed with her ten years,” said Bob. “She’s the most

baffling girl I know. When she's all storm *inside*, she's as calm as a summer day *outside*! Now, when *you're* mad, I know it; I only have to look into your eyes to see the devil's a-prancin.'"

"I'm just as good natured as you are!" I retorted sharply.

"Oh, I know *that*," he answered good-naturedly. "I like your way much better than Bonnie's. A fellow knows where he's standing, with you."

By this time we had turned off in an old wood road which was a short cut to the farm. Bob settled himself on a mossy rock and commenced to smoke his pipe, just as if I were not *a bit hungry*, and he had all day to spend in telling me that secret.

"Well," I burst out at last, "do you intend to tell me that secret, or sit on a rock all day gazing into space? Positively, you are the slowest man I ever saw! I don't know how you ever came to have red hair!"

"You shouldn't speak so plainly on such a

delicate subject, Ted," he retorted, as he lazily puffed at his pipe. "What's the use of your getting rattled?"

"It's *enough* to make me cross! I'm half starved, and I want to hear Bonnie's secret."

"Well, quit your sass, and I'll tell you," said he, knocking the ashes from his pipe and slowly he rose to his feet and followed me down the path. "Now don't get excited at the news," he warned. "Cousin Bonnie was engaged to be married, to Handsome, three years ago."

I stepped back and looked at Bob a minute; then I shrugged my shoulders and walked on again.

"Whether you believe it or not, what I am telling you is the truth, Ted, and if you'll let up on that high-and-mighty air, I'll tell you all about it."

"If you expect me to believe *that*, you must think I'm a *fool*!" I answered. "I, Bonnie's most intimate friend, not knowing

she was engaged to be married—No, I *don't* believe it!”

“It’s true, Ted. Wish I had told you before; you had a right to know.” “And I suppose this happened right under my nose,” said I, sarcastically.

“No, Ted, it didn’t happen right under your nose,” said Bob, provokingly. “You remember Bonnie spent the winter in Virginia with Aunt Helen three years ago, don’t you? Well, Bonnie met him down there. Virginia is his old home, you know. He fell in love with her the very first time he met her, and within three weeks they became engaged. Just before the time set for Bonnie’s return home they had a falling out, and Bonnie broke the engagement. Handsome has been trying to patch up the break, every since. He came to New York and started in business, and tagged around after Bonnie every place she went, but he told me he never got a chance to see her alone—not once.”

“I don’t see how she can resist him,” I

said wonderingly, "he is so handsome, and the most charming man I ever met."

"Oh, he *is*, is he?" snorted Bob, catching me by one arm and swinging me round to face him.

I leaned forward and straightened his tie, and told him to go on.

"And is Handsome the *nicest* man you know?" he demanded.

"Of course not! *You're* the *nicest*," I answered. "I only said Handsome was the most charming."

Bob shrugged his shoulders, and viciously kicked a stone out of his path. "I surmised some time ago that you liked Handsome," he said accusingly.

"Of course I *like* him, and I'd *like* to box your ears!" I said indignantly. "Now tell me the rest of Bonnie's love affair. I don't believe it, but I want to hear it."

"Well," said Bob defiantly, "Handsome isn't in love with *you* anyway—Bonnie's the only girl in the world for him!" and after that

foolish remark he became amiable again. "I don't blame Handsome for wanting Cousin Bonnie," he continued, "for she's mighty nice to look at, and a fine girl in her way. When I found out how much he really did think of her, I made up my mind to help him, so I did a little planning. When I was up here this spring a-fishing, I persuaded Aunt Molly to take a few of us to board; I told her the *nice kind* of folks, who would 'fit in' and delight in her comfortable old house and the big old-fashioned farm. I knew it would just suit you, and I thought you probably could persuade the other girls. Handsome was delighted with the plan, and the Professor said he'd like to come too. I knew that if Handsome were near Bonnie every day he'd have some chance. Well, it all worked out as I planned, and you're all up here enjoying the simple life—and I reckon all's well with Bonnie and Handsome. Now, what do *you* think about it?"

"What *don't* I think!" I answered crossly.

"I'm just as mad at Bonnie as I can be, and I'll never tell *her* if I get engaged a dozen times!"

"Righto, Ted! It's safest to confide in a man every time."

"Yes, you've just *proved* that," I answered snubbingly.



## VI

### COOKING A DINNER

Uncle Billy and Aunt Molly wanted to go visiting. The only thing that troubled Aunt Molly was how we were to get a hot dinner if she went away. Chatty and I immediately volunteered as cooks for the day.

“Go, Aunt Molly! Do!” said Chatty. “We’ll have a whoop-a-la time, cooking the dinner. We’ll show the men what bachelor girls can do in that line. They’re always making fun of us! And we’ll make them get on the job, too.”

When Aunt Molly came rattling into the kitchen in her best black silk gown and gay Sunday bonnet, she found Chatty and me ready for work, and she handed us each a big blue gingham apron while she gave her parting instructions.

“You’ll find all the pans and kettles you want in *this* closet, and all the dishes you want in *that* closet, and whatever *extra* you want to eat you’ll find in the cellar,” and she gave a parting look around her nice clean kitchen, to see that everything was in perfect order.

The first thing that Chatty and I did was to set the men to work. Bob brought us a basket of chips and two big armfuls of wood, and Handsome carried in a pail of fresh water. The Professor caught us a rooster; Bob chopped off its head, Handsome cleaned it, and I cooked it. Chatty tied an apron round each of the men, so they could string beans and peel potatoes, and do all such little things, and soon we were all running about the kitchen, bumping into each other and bossing our nearest helper.

“Bob, take that scoop away from Chatty, before she dumps the whole box of sugar into the pudding!” I ordered.

“Mind your own business, Ted,” called

Chatty. "Isn't this a lark!" she cried, as she ran across the room, trailing flour behind her. "Polly put the kettle on, and we'll all take tea," she sang gaily, as she filled the tea-kettle and spilled half a dipperful of water on Aunt Molly's clean, shining stove.

I gave my attention to the chicken. We were to have chicken pot-pie, and I wanted the dumplings to be light and fluffy. Suddenly there was a crash of breaking china.

"Lawsee! What's happenin'!" said Bob, jumping up, and unexpectedly dropping the butter dish, butter side down, on Aunt Molly's clean rag carpet.

"Oh, it's only me, breaking an old saucer. Nothing to be alarmed about," said Chatty, as she opened a closet door, and poked her head out. "Handy arrangement here, Ted"—she set aside a pile of plates, and jumped down—"See! a closet door opens on the dining-room side, and one on the kitchen side. I'm going to have one just like it, when I go housekeeping."

“Chatty, you are too ridiculous for words!” I lectured. “Anybody would think you were a child, the way you act.”

“Oh, shut up, old Honey Bunch,” she sassed, as she caught me around the waist, and sat me down on a chair. “I’m going to jump dishclosets and ditches when I’m sixty, if I choose!”

“Well, get out of here,” said I. “You’ve messed things enough for one morning. Go to the barn, or somewhere, while I finish getting dinner.”

“All right, I’ll go. But I’ll come back soon, and I’ll bring the pups along, and maybe a nice big black spider to poke down your neck!” She waved her hand to me sweetly. “Au revoir, Ted!”

I had just taken a big juicy huckleberry pie from the oven and set it to cool on the bench outside the kitchen window, when I heard Bob exclaim, “Jinkety whiz! Ted, come here, quick! Look at your *pie!*” and when I looked out, there was *my juicy pie*—

alas!—part of it on the ground, and part of it spilled over those meddling old hens! Bob, holding his sides and laughing fit to explode, pointed to an old rooster whose comb was dripping hot huckleberry juice. It *did* look funny—and that certainly was the unhappiest old fowl I've ever seen. Poor old rooster! He finally got so enraged that he flew at all the hens, and sent them squawking and clucking in every direction. Chatty heard the racket, and came running from the barn. She laughed until she nearly fell into the bucket of swill—and I was so mad about losing my pie that I wished she *had*! Then I smelled something burning, and when I ran back to the stove I found the beets all burned to the bottom of the pot and not a drop of water left on them. *Two* things spoiled! I was ready to cry—so I turned to vent my wrath on Bonnie. “What’s the matter with these potatoes, Bonnie?” said I. (They were almost black.)

“I don’t know,” answered Bonnie, indif-

ferently, as she leaned lazily back in the one kitchen rocking-chair, with her hands clasped behind her head, and watched the steam coming from the pot. "I only put the water on, and threw in a handful of saleratus."

"Saleratus!" whooped Bob. "Gee! What cooks! I'll lay you ten to one that I can beat any one of you girls at cooking."

"You can't beat *me*," I boasted, "I went to cooking school, and can show my diploma."

"Diploma nothing!" retorted Bob. "I learned to cook in camp, and got the stuff thrown at me if it wasn't good. Reckon I'd better make the coffee anyway, and then we'll have something fit to drink!"

I turned my back on Bob, and didn't pretend to listen to any more of his bragging. "Will you set the table, Bonnie?" I asked. Bonnie rose languidly from the rocking-chair, leaned over, and whispered in my ear that she had a stomach-ache, and she'd have to go upstairs and lie down.

Handsome and the Professor were standing

out in the back yard talking, and I called to them, and asked if they would set the table. They would! And they did! And such a "set" as it was! They put the sugar bowl at one end of the table, the milk pitcher at the other; the knives to the left and the forks to the right; and not a single dish in its rightful place. Then the Professor gathered a huge bouquet of hollyhocks and placed it in the center of the table, so that we looked quite festive. Bob helped dish up the edibles, and spilled *everything*. Chatty offered to take up the corn—and then made an awful fuss doing it.

"This corn *bobs*; I can't get it out—and the steam is burning my fingers," she howled, as she let a big ear fall on the floor. "Where's Bonnie?" she asked suddenly, as she stopped dancing and blowing on her fingers.

"She says she has a stomach-ache," I whispered.

"Shall I take her the hot-water bag?" asked Chatty, all sympathy.

"No," I said, "just call her, and say dinner is served."

Chatty gave one look at my face, and then she giggled.

When we all sat down at the table we looked at the *stuff*, and we looked at each other. No one seemed *anxious* to begin. We started with the chicken; it didn't need carving—it was so tender it fell apart, and I boasted that it would taste "Awful good." Bob took the first bite. "Yoi, yoi! *What* did you put in the chicken, Ted?" he choked, as he made an awful face, and I saw that he wasn't "putting on," either.

"What's the matter?" I asked. I took a bite, then leaned back in my chair and glared at Handsome.

"*You* did it! You spoiled my nice chicken!" I wailed.

"Why—*what* did *I* do?" asked Handsome, dismayed.

"Do! What *didn't* you do!" I cried, indignantly. "You broke the gall, and left

it in the chicken!" At that they all burst out laughing—all but *me*. I was too *mad* to laugh. After taking such pains to get that chicken tender, and the dumplings all light and fluffy—and now not a piece was fit to eat! We proceeded to try the other "eats." Nothing tasted good. *Someone* had forgotten to put salt and pepper in the string beans.

"Well, you needn't look at *me* like that, Ted," said Chatty, "I put most a pound of butter in, to make 'em taste good."

The corn was tough; the beets tasted burny; the potatoes didn't look nice. Finally we tried Chatty's rice pudding. It looked queer and wrinkly on top. I tried to push a spoon into it, and finally got it in, but couldn't pull it out again.

"Chatty, how much rice did you put in?" I asked.

"Five cups full," she answered calmly. "Why—what's the matter?"

"Five cups of rice to one quart of milk!"

I howled, and all the rest joined in. "Ho, Chatty, you're a grand cook!"

"Didn't you say five cups full?" demanded Chatty, when we had sobered down a bit. "Mercy, no! I said five *tablespoons*," said I, seized a knife and proceeded to cut the pudding into cubes, and passed them around.

"Talk about 'pot luck'! We fellows have had it today, all right!" said Bob, when we finished the pudding. "You see now, for yourselves, what kind of wives *bachelor girls* would make! No Club girls for *you* nor *me*, boys! We'll marry girls who can cook."

Handsome looked at Bonnie and smiled, and the Professor gazed lovingly at Chatty as if to say that he'd gladly eat *sour dough* for her.

"Somehow, I don't feel satisfied," said Bonnie, pushing her plate away.

"Let's go down cellar and get a cold lunch," suggested Bob. "Yes, let's!" echoed Chatty, and down cellar we went.

Aunt Molly's cellar is large and airy and

clean, with crocks and tubs and jars, all full of good things to eat, standing in every corner, and there were two big swing shelves, where we found a perfect feast.

“Here, Piggy! Don’t take *all* that pot-cheese!” Chatty elbowed me in the ribs, and after stealing half of my pot-cheese she sat down on the cellar bottom, by a pot of raspberry jam, with her dish and spoon.

Bob satisfied himself with a slice of ham between two thick pieces of homemade rye bread. There never was such rye bread as Aunt Molly makes! I found Handsome around one side of the swing shelf with his spoon in a whole case of honey, and he looked as if he were having a blissful time. The Professor looked very undignified with a moustache of buttermilk on his upper lip; and Bonnie looked actually piggish, sitting on a tub in one corner, with a big apple pie in her lap—and that pie was going fast!

We ate, and ate! Somehow things taste better when you eat in picnic fashion. After

we were all stuffed full, I suggested that we go upstairs and clean up the kitchen and dining-room, and we all got 'on the job' immediately — *except Bonnie. She* — disappeared!

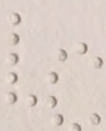
When we were through cleaning, the kitchen looked almost as nice as when Aunt Molly left it. We washed the dishes and pans, and Bob scrubbed the spot where he dropped the butter on the carpet. We even blackened the stove, till it shone anew. Then Chatty and I went upstairs to take a bath and get some fresh clothes on, and *there* in her room we found Bonnie, stretched out on her bed, taking a beauty nap. But she didn't take it any longer! I took her shoulders and Chatty grabbed her feet, and we rolled her out on the floor. Then I held her fast, while Chatty spanked her with my bedroom slippers!

## VII

### IN CUPID'S GARDEN

It was down in the orchard, where a branchy old apple-tree, all crooked and gnarled, parted in the middle to form a level seat just wide enough for *two*. A soft breeze was stirring, filling the air with the odor of ripening apples; and from the field nearby sounded the soft clash of waving corn leaves. It was early evening, and in the woods across the fields a hermit-thrush sang.

Bob and I were out for a walk, and we cut across the corn-field. When we reached the stone wall below the orchard we heard voices close by, and then I heard Bonnie say—"Why—did you do that for *me*, Handsome?" and Handsome answered—"Yes, because you're *you*, precious," and then we heard a kiss. I turned to run. Bob caught hold of my skirt, and pulled me down behind the



wall. "Keep still, or I'll kiss *you*," he threatened.

The voices continued. "Have you written the school trustees that you wouldn't be back next term, sweetheart?"

"No, Handsome, I'd rather teach next term." And I thought to myself "What a fib!" for Bonnie never did like to teach, nor to do anything else much.

"I'd rather you wouldn't, love," said Handsome. "You know we are to be married right after the holidays. I wish you would send in your resignation now, dear."

I made another break to get away, but Bob grabbed my arm and sat me down again.

"Haven't you any *shame*, Bob?" I whispered.

"I'll search!" he whispered back, and then he turned his pockets inside out, in great haste. The only thing for me to do, after that, was to sit still.

Of course I ought to have put my fingers in my ears, but I didn't. I wasn't going to



have Bob hear it all, and then tell me anything he pleased, so I sat as quiet as a mouse.

More kisses on the other side of the wall. *Bonnie* being kissed! *Bonnie*, who always said she *hated* to be kissed, *loathed* kisses!

"I wonder what Cousin Bob would say if he knew we 'made up' before we came up here this summer?" I heard *Bonnie* coo—between kisses.

"He won't know anything about it, dearest. He will naturally think it came about through our being up *here*—all as the result of his scheme. It's only fair to let him think he was the means of bringing us together. We owe him that pleasure, for he *was* good to me."

Bob and I made eyes at each other, behind the stone wall. Then we heard them get up and walk away. As soon as they were out of hearing, Bob and I climbed over and occupied the tree-seat.

"WELL!" said Bob.

"Well!" I burst out indignantly, "they've treated you nicely, haven't they?"

"What's the odds?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "All's well that ends well."

"Shall we let them know *we* know?"

"Of course not, Ted. It wouldn't be a bit of satisfaction. It's impossible to tease Bonnie, or Handsome either."

"Well, I don't care about teasing Bonnie—she's been just too mean for anything—so stingy with her old love affair!" I answered crossly.

"Go easy, Ted. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," said he.

"Bob, things are getting serious between Chatty and the Professor," I said hastily, as I looked away from him. "Did you know it? Chatty has the Professor just where she wants him, now."

"You're dreaming, Ted! The Prof is a confirmed old bachelor. He only likes Chatty's company because she amuses him."

"You don't know anything about it, Bob!" I cried. "He's *in love* with Chatty, and I

*know* it. He's just too bashful to tell her so, poor thing."

Bob laughed.

"Well, you needn't laugh! You watch him sometime, when we're all together, and you'll see how differently he looks at Chatty, from the way he looks at Bonnie and me."

Bob laughed again. "You're ,way off the track, Ted, but to satisfy you I'll keep an eye on him, and see if there's any difference in the way he looks at you girls."

"And you'd better look out for yourself Bob!" I said warningly, "for I think Chatty has designs on *you*."

At that Bob laughed so long and loud that I was afraid everybody at the house would come running down through the orchard to find out what the racket was about.

"What the devil have you got in your head, anyway, Ted?" said he, between laughs, and he threw out an arm to pull me back, as I jumped up from the tree-seat; but I was too quick for him, and slipped through the orchard

to the house. Somehow he acted as if I had made a fool of myself, and I didn't want to see him again that night.

## VIII

### HUCKLEBERRYING

“Let’s go huckleberrying this morning, girls and boys. No dissenting votes? Then the motion’s carried!” so said Bob at the breakfast table, next morning. Well, we went *huckleberrying*! And I never want to go *huckleberrying* again; neither does Chatty.

Uncle Billy said he would show us where the biggest berries grew thick, up in North Swamp, so we started off, with empty tin pails and full lunch baskets.

First we travelled along a narrow dirt road, then we turned off into the woods and followed a winding cow path. As we neared the edge of the forest we heard the tinkle of a cow bell, and when we reached the clearing we saw, beyond a hazel hedge, a drove of

cattle feeding on the thick green pasture grass.

“Co-tie, co-tie,” called Chatty, as she held out her hand to a pretty Jersey cow nearby. “Here, cusha, cusha!” she called, still holding her hand outstretched to the pretty, gentle-looking creature. “Moo,” timidly responded the cow, looking at Chatty with big tender eyes, and then, with quick steps, her full smooth udder swinging between her hind legs, the cow reached out and thrust her moist nose into Chatty’s hand. I saw an empty paper lying by Chatty’s feet, and when I walked up behind her I discovered that she was feeding salt to the cow.

“You wretch!” I exclaimed. “You’ve taken all the salt we had in our lunch-basket.”

“I don’t care! Uncle Billy said salt was good for cows,” said Chatty indifferently, as she laid her face down by the cow’s, and tickled the creature’s soft nose. “Um—Ah! Come here and smell the cow’s breath.

You say you love *nature*, Ted. Come here and smell it."

I put my head down by Chatty's, and took a whiff—then another, and another. It smelled like all out-of-doors.

"What are you doing—kissing the cow?" asked Bob, as he walked up to us.

"No, we're smelling its breath," I answered. "Come take a whiff."

"Ted, I'm amazed at *you*—the way you used to play in the cowlot, when you were a kid, and never smelled a cow's breath before!"

"You know I was always afraid of cows."

"No, I don't remember that. But I recollect the time you got mad at me, when we were paddling in the brook, and you walked up to a cow that stood there, and squirted milk all over my face and clothes," said Bob, as he let down the bars for me to pass through.

I turned around to say something back to

Bob, and there I saw Chatty, on her knees beside the cow, with her head down beside its udder, "Chatty! What are you doing *now?*" I asked. She jumped up guiltily—"I was milking milk into my mouth, and it tickled like fun," she giggled. Bob said "Oh!" and leaned against the fence, and almost laughed himself away.

After crossing the pasture-lots we came to a lane running in toward another patch of woods. Uncle Billy said he would leave us here, and go on to Burnt Meadows to cut hay. He turned away, then came back to us, and pointed to a great mass of jagged rocks just off the road.

"That's Wildcat Den," said he, "where Brother Jim shot the biggest wildcat ever killed in these parts. It was a September night, with as fine a harvest moon as ever I see. We were out coon huntin', Jim and me. Had Loud, our best coon-dog, with us, and Uno, a young hound we were trainin' in for coon huntin.' We followed West Brook a

little ways, then turned off along the foot of the ridge, and had almost reached these rocks, when we heard Loud barkin' not far away.

“‘Come along, Jim!’ I called, ‘The dog’s barkin’ up. Got a coon treed, sure.’

“We hurried up those rocks you see ahead. All of a sudden we heard a yell that made our hair stand on end, and the next minute Uno came yelping toward us, with the blood runnin’ out o’ his eyes in a stream. Jim dashed ahead, and I close behind. As we swung down over that big boulder a wildcat whirled round on us—his back humped up, and his eyes blazin’ like balls of fire. With another bloodcurdling yell he turned, and leaped down the rocks.

“‘*Let fly, Jim!*’ I called.

“At the first crack, Jim’s gun kicked—hit Jim on the head, and flew out of his hand. He fell in one direction, the gun in the other. I stood still, too scared to speak or move. *I* had filled the guns that morning, and I guess I

plugged Jim's too full. Suddenly Jim's voice brought me back to my senses.

"'Confound you, you shallow-pated young fool! What in blazes did you fill that gun so chock-full that it kicked, for?' he shouted.

"When I ventured below, I found him sitting up on the rocks, and I swan! he looked madder than the cat he had shot at!

"'For two cents I'd break your young neck!' he growled, when I asked if he was hurt.

"Finally he got up and limped down the path, ordering me to go back and see if he'd killed the cat. I climbed up over the rocks where the wildcat had disappeared, and there at the top I found him, stretched out dead. He was a big fellow—measured thirty-nine inches from tip to tail. Jim felt a mite better when he saw the cat, but he didn't seem to be in a humor for any more adventures that night, so we made for home.

"Now I'll leave you people, and go on my

way. Bring your pails home full, and I'll guarantee you'll get some good huckleberry pie! Follow the sheep-path up over the rocks yonder, and you'll come to the swamp in about five minutes. Good-bye!"

North Swamp is the most dismal hole I ever saw, but right in its center we saw a large rock with a cedar tree on it. Bonnie and Chatty and I made for that spot, while the men started to break branches off the tall swamphuckleberry bushes which formed a hedge around the swamp. We girls volunteered to pick the berries off the branches the men brought us, and when we started on the job we thought huckleberrying was a picnic. That is, Chatty and I did; Bonnie sat on the only patch of moss on the rock, and merely *looked on*. It occurred to me that this was a good opportunity for me to plague Bonnie, just to see what she would have to say for herself. She had kept her love affair to herself long enough, and I made up my mind I

wouldn't hold my tongue any longer, for Bob or anyone else.

"Chatty," said I in a careless tone, "doesn't it seem to you that Bonnie and Handsome have grown very intimate, since we came up here this summer?" I shot a glance at Bonnie to see how she was taking it. Evidently she was not paying attention, or did not hear. She was leisurely chewing huckleberries.

"I suppose it's natural that they should," said Chatty. "You and Bob are always off a-hiking together, and I'm studying botany with the Professor; I guess we've left Bonnie and Handsome pretty much to themselves."

Somehow Chatty's view of the case irritated me. I leaned over, and pinched her.

"Ouch! What did you do *that* for, Ted?"

"Because Bonnie has a confession to make, and I want you to wake up and take it all in."

"Oh! What is it, Bonnie?" said Chatty, at once, greatly interested.

Bonnie looked up at me, her eyes filled with innocent wonder. "*I have something to confess?*" she asked with mild surprise. She hadn't even turned a shade pinker. It was *too much!* "Chatty, she's engaged; she's *engaged to Handsome*—" I blurted.

Chatty was surprised enough to please anybody. Her eyes got bigger and bigger, as she stared at us both. Then she reached over and bearhugged Bonnie till that stately personage was "all rumped up." "It's *great!* Simply *great!*" cried Chatty, excitedly.

"Great, indeed!" I snorted. "I'd like to know what there is that's great about it! I called it downright mean and tricky—your most intimate friend getting engaged without even hinting about it, and leaving you to find out the best way you could. She doesn't care a rap for my friendship now—"

"You have *me*, Ted," Chatty reminded me sweetly.

"Yes, and I suppose *you* will do the same identical thing. Seems to me you're not as keen about staying single as you used to be!"

"Well, perhaps not—" said Chatty musingly, with a faraway look in her eyes. "Sometimes I think I *shall* stay single,—and sometimes I think I *shan't*. When I last called on Ruth Dana, and her three sticky youngsters—'little loves,' *she* calls them—almost ruined my new charmeuse gown, I felt like slapping them, every one; and I silently thanked my stars that I wasn't in Ruth's shoes. But when she brought the baby in, just awake from his nap, he was so *dear*, and nestled in my arms so cunningly, I felt like getting married right away, and having one just like him. And that's the way it goes; one is never *sure* what one will do—but there's one thing certain, Ted—if I ever do get engaged, I'll tell you the first one!" she ended, comfortingly.

Bob approached us, with an armful of

branches. "I reckon you girls are eating more berries than you're putting in the pails," said he, as he threw the branches at our feet, and looked at our stained lips.

"You do your part of the job, and we'll do ours," said Chatty.

When Bob was out of hearing again, Bonnie leaned over and laid her hand on my arm. There was a look of mild reproach in her eyes. "Ted, dear, you musn't mind because I didn't tell you about my engagement," she said. "Somehow, I can't *talk* about those things. Sometime you'll understand."

I suddenly felt ashamed, and ignorant, and insignificant—but I didn't let Bonnie know I felt that way; I just shrugged my shoulders, and turned my back, and picked berries as fast as my fingers could fly.

Bob and Handsome and the Professor did their part of the job, all right; indeed, they overdid it! They piled branches around us

till we could hardly see over the top. Finally Chatty and I got tired.

"It sounds as if you men were having too good a time over there," called Chatty. "You'd better come help *us*." Bob, peeping into our fort, snubbingly reminded her that an hour before we had been "falling all over each other, to see who could get the most berries."

"That's so too, Bob," she retorted, "but let me tell you that this rock is no soft cushion to sit on. If you don't come soon to help us in here, we'll quit entirely, and leave you to finish the job yourself." So the men-folks stopped breaking branches, and came to help us with the picking and *eating*.

"What is this?" asked the Professor, stooping down to pick a small, long pear from a cactus-plant growing on the rock. He readjusted his eye-glasses. "A prickly pear! I knew they grew in the crevices of rocks in the mountains, but I never saw a ripe one before."

“Are they good to eat? Give me a bite,” said Chatty, and, reaching over, she took a big bite before the Professor could stop her. “Bah—Ow—Mercy! For the love of Mike! give me something to drink!” she cried, as she danced about us, making the most awful faces.

“I understand”—said the Professor slowly, —“that these little pears are covered with invisible prickles, which should be wiped off before they are eaten.”

“It’s a pity you didn’t tell me that before I took a bite!” snapped Chatty at him, and he looked unhappy the rest of the day. (Maybe it was because he got some of those prickles in the end of his fingers.)

Poor Chatty had such a sore mouth from the old pear that she could not eat her dinner. It really was sad to see her sit there starving, while we consumed the goodies, but ’way down in my heart I didn’t feel one bit sorry for her, for our hard-boiled eggs and our

tomatoes didn't taste a bit good without the salt she had fed to her cow.

After lunch Bob had the audacity to suggest that we fill our empty lunch-baskets with berries, but we girls declined with haste, and slid down off the rock—and the men, finding they would have to do all the work, soon followed us. Outside the huckleberry hedge we found a boggy marsh, with dirty wet mire between the bogs, and we had to do a lot of jumping, to keep from getting our feet wet. I had almost reached the other side of the marsh when I was startled by a shriek. Then more shrieks! It was Chatty's voice. She had gotten across ahead of us. Now she ran screaming to the edge of the marsh.

"Oh, the beasts!" she cried. "They'll kill me. The beasts!" she screamed, wildly waving her hands, and madly jumping about.

One awful thought came into my mind—"Wildcats are after Chatty!"—and half blindly

I started across the bogs, giving great frightened leaps, with Bob close behind me. Suddenly I missed my footing, and down I went, splash! into the blackest, dirtiest muck ever seen, and pulled Bob in with me.

“Good Heavens! Chatty! The wildcats!” I cried, as I tried to pull my feet out, and sank in up to my knees. “*Wildcats!* Where are they, Chatty?” I screamed, as I looked across the marsh and saw Handsome hitting right and left with his hat. “*Where* are the wildcats?” I wailed. “Save Chatty!”

“Wildcats!” called Handsome, laughingly, “Why, we couldn’t resurrect one if we tried. It’s *hornets!*” He flapped his hat about him. “There! They are all gone now, every one.” I heard him say soothingly to Chatty. She was holding her hands out toward me, and I saw the tears rolling down her face. “Oh, see! Oh, how they pain!” she cried pitifully. Handsome started daubing mud on the swellings.

"I'm coming!" I called, as I gave a lively pull with one leg. I couldn't *budge*!

"Why don't you help me?" I cried, turning to Bob. He stood doubled over, as if he had a pain, and I couldn't see his face. I gave another jerk, and sank in deeper.

"Have you got appendicitis, or what is the matter with you, Bob?" I said, becoming alarmed. I reached over and shook his arm frantically, as I felt myself sliding in, deeper and deeper. "We're in quicksand, Bob!" Then I raised my voice—"We're in quicksand! Come and help us," I screamed. "*We are sinking in quicksand, and Bob's got appendicitis!*"

They came running, jumping, over the bog to us. I tried to kick a leg loose, and sat down *flat* with a splash. I looked to Bob for sympathy. He was still doubled up, making a low moaning sound. I saw tears dropping off his face, from under his raised arm. Then he threw back his head.

"*Wow!*" he howled. "*Wow!* Oh, Ted,

if you could only see yourself!" and he doubled up again, *laughing*. He had been *laughing* all the time! I looked up. All the rest of them stood in the bog,—*laughing*! Even *Chatty* with one lip swollen till it touched her nose, and the other lip swollen till it touched her chin—even *she* was gurgling with impish glee. I looked at Bob. He was still hugging himself, and rocking back and forth, in the mud.

"*Bob, you're a fool! You big blaz-ed fool!*" I cried, and then I burst into tears. I never called him a fool before, and I hope I never shall again; but I *couldn't* help it! My tears must have sobered him, for in a minute he was trying to help me out of the muck. He on one side, and Handsome on the other, managed to haul me out. When I put my hands to my face, it felt all crusty.

"Oh, Ted! You are the funniest sight imaginable!" gurgled *Chatty* as distinctly as she could with her swollen lips. "You're spattered and mucked from head to foot.

There's a smudge on the tip of your nose, and another on your chin, and speckles all between."

"Well, I can't look any *worse* than *you* do!" I blazed, wrathfully. "Your clothes are all covered with beggar's lice and burdock burrs, and your face would stop an eight-day clock!"

The Professor heard me, and gave me the most reproachful look, and then he kept close by Chatty all the way home, and helped her over all the rough places, and gave her little love-pat glances out of the corner of his eye.

*Never* will I forget my walk home from that swamp. At every step the muck oozed up inside my shoes; my face was so crusted with dirt that I could hardly see, and I walked in the rear, so that the others could not look at me.

"My! Been in a bee's nest?" asked Uncle Billy, looking at Chatty's awful face as we straggled up the lane.

“And *you!* *Where* on the face of the earth have *you* been?” he ejaculated, as he caught sight of *me*.

“Been! Where do I look as if I’d been?” I called back, as I scuttled away to the house.

That night the Professor proposed to Chatty.



## IX

### LOVE AND A WISH-BONE

Chatty sat on the foot of my bed, and awakened me out of a sound sleep to tell me!

"I'm engaged, Ted! He's lovely! And you're to be my maid-of-honor, Honey."

"No, I *won't* be your maid-of-honor!" I snapped. "I'm always buying fine clothes to be somebody's maid-of-honor, and then going in rags the rest of the time. And *who* is it that's lovely, and that you're engaged to?" I inquired suddenly, getting awake all at once.

"Why, the *Professor*, Goosie! Who would it be? Oh, I forgot to tell him something!"—and she hopped off the bed.

"Well, sit still; you can't tell him *now*—I hear him snoring."

"How can you, Ted!" exclaimed Chatty

indignantly. "I wasn't going to tell him now. And anyway, it isn't the Professor you hear snoring—it's Bob."

"No, it isn't Bob," I said crossly. "People don't snore till after they're forty, and Bob is only thirty. I suppose you think the Professor is too *dignified* to snore!"

"Now, Ted, you're disagreeable and horrid. If it were you who had gotten engaged, I'd be rejoicing, and clapping my hands, and hugging you. It will be lovely when I go housekeeping. I'll have you come to visit me, the very first one!"

"And eat the things *you* cook, and die of indigestion," said I.

"Oh, Ted, you're awful," she said, "but I can't be mad at you. I know its dreadful for you, as President of the Club, to lose *two* of us at once, but it can't be helped. Do you know, Ted, I've been in love with the Professor ever since I took my University course, and he made me study my noodle off to get through. He wasn't sure I cared for him

*that* way, and I wasn't sure about it either, till he proposed. And, Ted—I know it isn't proper to tell, but I promised you I would—I mean, how he proposed. He and I were sitting out on the back-door steps, when I happened to think of a wish I wanted to make, and I ran into the house and got a wish-bone off the mantel, where I had hung it to dry.

“I gave the Professor one end of the bone, and told him to make a wish and then pull hard. I got the shortest end. ‘Oh, dear!’ I said, “I wanted the longest end, so I could get my wish. I didn't want the shortest end, and get married first.’ And the Professor—you know we always thought he was bashful, Ted, but he isn't a bit—he just leaned over and said ‘*Suppose we get married at the same time, dear?*’ For a minute I couldn't think or say anything—then I reached up and gave him the *tightest* hug. He isn't a bit silly, or mushy, but he's awfully affectionate, and he's so protecting, and he—”

"You said you'd never get married," I butted in.

"Oh, I know I *said* so, but can't a person change her mind?"

"You've been in love before," I reminded her.

"No, Ted, it wasn't *the real thing* before. I've liked lots of boys, but this is different. The Professor isn't a boy; he's a *man*, and I love him, and can always look up to him."

"Yes, and look a good ways up," I observed, "and you'll have to stand on your toes in the bargain. I suppose you won't be able to think or talk anything but Professor from now on."

"I suppose not," she sighed. "Nothing else interests me. I *only* want the Professor."

"Chatty!"

"Yes, it's so, Ted. You'll get there too, some day. See if you don't! And *then* you'll understand."

"Chatty, you make me tired!"

"There's no use of my explaining things to

you, Honey," she said in the most maddening, elderly way. "You can never understand, till you're engaged yourself."

"You had a hundred excuses for not getting married, till lately," I snapped.

"I don't remember 'em now, Ted—really I don't."

"Oh!" I said in disgust, "after all the plans you and Bonnie and I made together—our plans for the future. How about the bungalow we were to build?"

"Oh, *you* can build it, Ted," she answered brightly, "and Bonnie and I will come up every summer with our husbands and children, to board with you. Do you know, Ted dear, 'way down in my heart I always did intend to get married, if I could have the right man. Confess, Ted, that *you* feel that way too!" she said, catching me by the shoulders and looking searchingly into my eyes. "Even if you *are* President of the Bachelor Girls' Club, and an awfully independent person. Confess, Ted!"

“Confess *nothing!*” I growled savagely, rolling over in my blanket. “I’m going to sleep.”

## X

### CONCERNING A COURTSHIP

"He's old enough to be her father, and a foot and a half taller than she! It will be the most absurd match I ever heard of, and our Bachelor Girl Club will be broken up. Chatty was the life of it."

"Oh, come, Ted; you know you didn't want Chatty to fool the Professor," said Bob.

"No, I didn't," I answered honestly and wearily, "but I'm so lonesome! Bonnie sits and dreams every minute when she isn't with Handsome, and when I ask her anything she just looks up with a vacant smile and doesn't say a word. And Chatty does nothing but talk about the Professor, every time I'm with her, and she acts so silly when she's with him, that I'm ashamed of her! I'm tired of it all, and I'll be glad to get home again."

“You’re not fair to *me*, Ted. I’m always at your heels—and now I have the bulliest news in the world to tell you!”

Bob’s voice was so boisterously happy that I turned to look at him, and it flashed through my mind that he had one of two things to tell me, and a sudden fear seized me.

“I—I want to get something from upstairs!” I gasped, and away I sped, up the porch steps, and through the hall, and up to my room—and then I stamped my foot, and called myself a coward and a fool. Why hadn’t I stayed, and listened to Bob! I stormed around in the dark room, trying to get up enough courage to go down again,—but I *couldn’t* do it, so I undressed and went to bed.

Half an hour later Chatty came in and threw herself across the foot of my bed. “Ted,” said she, “I don’t know how I’ve ever lived so long without having the Professor love me. He’s the dearest man in the world!”

"You make me tired, Chatty!" I said, impatiently. "I don't know how he ever came to fall in love with such a chatterbox as you, at all. I don't believe you have a serious thought in your head."

"Oh, I'll get along in the world just as well as you will, Honey. *I* don't have to be serious; the Professor can do my thinks for me!" she crowed.

"If you weren't a bachelor girl, it would be different; but no one expects one of our kind to be so in love that she loses her head. And the way you used to laugh at other girls for being silly!"

"Oh, fudge! I didn't agree to be a bachelor girl always and forever. I've kept you company for a long time, Ted, and this is the way you thank me. Oh, by the way! I saw Bob on the porch steps before I came in. He had the big lantern by his side, and was evidently writing a letter. He wrote and wrote; and then tore it all to little bits, and when a scrap of paper fluttered my way I read it and

it was all full of love, to some girl. I always thought Bob was stuck on Margaret Chambers. Why——what is the matter, Ted? You look the way I felt the night the Professor didn't kiss me!" She rolled me over toward the light. "Don't you feel well, Honey?" and she gave a quick look at my swollen eyes.

"No!" I answered forlornly, and then I idiotically buried my face in the pillow and *cried*.

"Oh, that's too bad, dear. You haven't looked right for the last two days. I'll sleep with you tonight, and take care of you. Just snuggle down, and I'll tuck you in, and then I'll get a hotwater bag for your feet," and before I could stop her she was speeding down the hall.

"Ted's sick!" I heard her say. "I'm afraid she's getting typhoid, or something awful," and then it sounded like a whisper, a chuckle, and a giggle—but of course that was my imagination.

The next minute Bob was speaking through

the crack of my door. "Are you very ill, Ted? Shall I go for the doctor?" he asked, anxiously.

"No. Go—away," I choked, from under the covers.

"Ted," he said softly. "I got a letter, to-day, that made me the happiest fellow this side of New York——"

Just then Chatty appeared with the water bag, and proceeded to "tuck me in." Bob went off down the hall, slowly.

"Now, Ted, I won't kick once, and I'll be as quiet as a mouse," said Chatty, as she cuddled down beside me. Fancy *Chatty* being quiet!

Silence for five whole minutes.

"Oh, Ted, I forgot to tell you the Professor says he'll buy that old deserted farmhouse, and we'll have it for our summer home. Won't that be lovely!" and she gave me an ecstatic hug, and managed to kick the hot-water bag out of the bed.

Another silence. I *thought* she had gone to sleep.

“Say, Ted, we’ve decided on October for our wedding; the Professor says he won’t wait any longer.”

After a while she really did go to sleep, but I lay awake till after the big hall clock struck two; and then I dozed off, and dreamed that Bob was walking up the church aisle with Margaret Chambers, and the minister stood ready to marry them, and I stood in the gallery with a pistol in my hand, waiting to shoot Margaret. Then I opened my eyes to find the morning sun shining on my face, and I heard Chatty tripping down the hall.

I didn’t want any breakfast, and I didn’t want to see any one of that love-sick crowd—so I tiptoed down into the kitchen, and asked Aunt Molly for a glass of milk. She smiled one of her good-natured smiles, and cut me one of her big fat slices of homemade bread, and poured me a bowl of milk, fresh from the strainer-pail.

I know it was good bread and milk, but it went down hard. When I had finished eating, I slipped out of the kitchen and hurried around the barn, made a bee-line through Uncle Billy's wheat field, and didn't stop to draw a long breath till I was safely out of sight of the house, on the other side of the hill. Here I threw myself down upon the big rock by the old butternut tree. A tiny arm of the brook trickled under the rail fence in front of me, and beyond stretched a sunny meadow. I tried to get into a comfortable position, with my back against the tree. I couldn't get comfortable, at all. *Nothing* was *comfortable*, nor *nice*, nor *beautiful* in the universe, because—I tried to deny the cause, but it wouldn't be denied! There was no use of pretending any longer. "You *know* you're in love, now, don't you?" I said to myself. "Now you're *sure* of it, when it's too late," I told myself savagely. "You've found it out at last, *and it serves you right, too!*" and in my indignation I brought my

foot down whack! on the rock, and hurt my heel so that it brought the tears to my eyes—and *he* saw them, those tears—*Bob*, who was climbing over the rail fence at that moment. The next few minutes are not very clear in my mind. My heart was doing queer stunts, and I couldn't see. Then I felt Bob wiping my eyes, and I opened them to see him lying sprawled on the rock, with his head resting against my knee. I tried to rally my pride—to get up—but Bob took hold of my arm, and gently set me down again, and laid his head back in the old comfortable position, and gazed off across the meadow.

“This reminds me of the brook where you and I used to play, Ted,” he said. “Remember the day when you and I sat on the top rail of the fence which divided your grandfather's farm from Uncle Dave's place—with the meadow brook close by, and the big stone in the middle, where your shoes lay, and your pink sunbonnet, with its strings floating in the water—and your bare feet swung back

and forth between the fence rails, keeping time to the tune I played on my jewsharp? You and I were on the best of terms then, weren't we? Remember how you quarreled with me the day before that, because I didn't give you the only strawberry I found—but how, next morning, when I brought you *seven*, that I had crawled around in the wet grass to find, and I told you I had something *nice* for you in my pocket, you “made up” with me, and we went off to paddle in the brook?

“I remember how pleased you looked when I took a whole stick from my pocket, and broke off the biggest half *for you*—and how you turned to me, and told me I was ‘the loveliest boy alive,’ and that you'd like to stay with me all the time. Do *you* remember how I put my arms around you, and told you I'd share all the candy and strawberries I *ever* had, with you? And that we'd get married, when we were big enough, and live together in a little house by the brook, where we could step right out of our back-door into

the water, to paddle? And I said I'd give you wagon rides in the summer, and sled rides in the winter.

“‘Bob, will you do all that?’ you asked, looking up at me lovingly.

“‘Yes, and *more*,’ I said tenderly. ‘I’ll give you pancakes *twice a day*, with cream and sugar on ’em!’

“‘Aw, Bob, how nice!’ you murmured. ‘And you’ll never chop the heads off my dolls, to see what makes ’em cry? Nor poke their eyes out, to see what makes ’em go to sleep?’

“‘Never, *never* again! cross m’heart!’

“Then you hid your face against my shoulder, and whispered, ‘I guess I’ll marry you, Bob’—and taking the candy from our mouths, we let our lips meet in one long, sweet kiss—your hair blowing softly over my face, and your hands clasped tightly in mine. *Do you remember, Ted?*

“Then together, hand in hand, we went across the fields to tell your grandmother the glad news. And she, stooping down, kissed

us both, and said 'I hope you *do* wed, sometime, children!'"

His voice ceased; he sat silent for a moment.

"That was a good many years ago, Ted dear. Don't you think it's about time you made good your promise? The last time I asked you, you said that two people couldn't live on the salary I was making. That cut deep! I made up my mind I'd never ask you again until I earned much more. Yesterday I received a letter from my firm, saying Rogers had resigned, and that I was next in line for his job—so I reckon I could make a go of it *now*, if you'd make good *your* promise."

Bob raised his head, and pulled himself up until his eyes were level with mine, and—but *the rest* is just between Bob and me!

[FINIS]









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